

Testimony House Bill 1238
House Education Committee
January 21, 2025
Education Standards and Practices Board

Good morning, Vice Chair Schreiber-Beck and members of the committee. My name is Rebecca Pitkin, and I am the executive director of the North Dakota Education Standards and Practices Board (ESPB). I represent our Board in opposition to HB1238, which proposes lifetime licenses for teachers who have been teaching for 20 years, instead of the 30 years currently in administrative rules. Although 30 may seem like an arbitrary number, it represents the majority of an educator's career, during which time they are required to complete ongoing professional development and report offenses during each renewal period.

The Board appreciates the efforts made by Representative Ista since last session to address the reporting concerns as the safety of our students is a Board priority. We would ask for further discussion regarding what the reporting guidelines entail and the immediacy of reporting.

The Board has continued to meet regarding this topic since last session. A summary of the Board's views on this topic was discussed in July 2024, and the Board recommended no changes to the current 30-year license. The Board's conclusions were as follows:

1. ESPB needs to continue to require self-reporting on renewals, particularly considering a recent increase in special meetings to address boundary violations. This has been addressed in the bill.
2. ESPB is currently in the administrative rules process, adding specificity relating to boundary violations in the ethics section of administrative rules. The removal of a "check" would contradict these efforts.
3. Lowering the requirements of ongoing education for teachers does not promote the profession.
4. Requiring 6 reeducation college credits in 5 years should not be a reason to leave the profession and many of these credits can be obtained at the district level.
5. Given the recent reading requirements, and now HB 2213—relating to the science of math—as well as increased changes in education, teachers need to continue to engage in professional development, as do all occupational board licensees.
6. Beneficial, content specific professional development credits are readily available in all formats. North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) provides numerous professional development opportunities to assist and support schools as well as the North Dakota Education Hub and North Dakota United.

In 2024, former Governor Burgum approved emergency rules allowing teacher education students who had completed all their coursework, except for student teaching, to act as the teacher of record, (or be the teacher) with signatures from schools indicating they would provide support to those individuals. This was met with mixed responses, as is all change, but it is the position of the Board that a person trained as a teacher is more qualified than a substitute teacher

who has had potentially no training in teacher education. To date, 69 individuals have received a teaching authorization, evidencing not all teacher education students are qualified or want this pathway. The attention to the shortage resulted in the Governor's Retention and Recruitment task force, whose recommendations will no doubt be addressed this session. There was no recommendation from the committee for less professional development for teachers, but instead, seven other recommendations for state lawmakers to consider this session, all of which would directly benefit educators.

HB1238 would allow an individual to potentially receive a lifetime license in their early 40's, with many more years in their career to teach. In the past 10 years, education has seen dramatic changes in areas such as technology integrations, the impact of social media on students, trauma and mental health of students, and changing ways of assessment to name a few. In addition, the public perception of teaching has been impacted negatively.

Most states require continuing education for license renewal. Both teachers and learners benefit from this; teachers become better at their craft and content, leading to a positive impact on the learning experiences of students and their achievements. A recent survey of state teacher licensing boards indicates 83% require professional development courses to renew a license or certificate until the end of a teacher's career. Continuing education credits and requirements are a crucial way to ensure that teachers remain effective, and removing continuing education requirements also removes a crucial connection between individual teachers and the ongoing developments in the teaching field as whole.

Forty years ago, I received my first teaching license, a lifetime license. Thirty-five years ago, I received a letter from that state indicating my life license was no longer valid and ongoing professional learning was needed for the life of my license. The past 10 years has been filled with change both in learners and in teachers. Rapid change has occurred in remote learning, real time assessment and feedback, technology integration, artificial intelligence, individualized learning models and many other areas. Teachers are the model of life-long learning that we constantly advocate for our students. Teachers do need to be rewarded for their work and commitment to our learners, and the board recognizes this fact, but this bill is not the solution.

Madam Vice-Chair and Members of the Committee, this concludes my testimony. I stand for any questions.

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